

DISTRICT NURSING IN CANADA*

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THE pioneers in district nursing in Canada were the Sisters of Charity, who also led the way in hospital nursing. The well-known Sisters of Providence have long been engaged in this work, especially in the cities of the Province of Quebec. They go their rounds in pairs, taking with them whatever material is necessary for the services they may be called upon to perform, and they frequently remain hours, or even days, with patients who are too ill to be left in the care of inexperienced hands.

Several of the hospitals also send their nurses out as district nurses, notably the Maternity and Western Hospitals in Montreal. The Winnipeg General Hospital has boarded and lodged one of its graduates for this purpose for the last three years. Nor has the field been left entirely to the hospitals and orders mentioned. Various philanthropic societies have taken up the work of district nursing and are doing all in their power to thus lessen the sufferings of humanity. Perhaps the one of longest standing is the Nursing-at-Home Mission in Toronto, which began operations about fourteen years ago in this lovely way:

A nurse, who was taking a post-graduate course at the Children's Hospital in Toronto, was so impressed with the sad condition in which many of the children were brought to the hospital that she determined to see what could be done by carrying the skill and tenderness of a trained nurse into the homes of the poor. She therefore left the hospital, rented a room, and began work in the district. Her example of devotion was soon followed by another nurse, and shortly afterwards this work came under the auspices of the Mission Union. Finally a home was provided where three women were taken in for training. The superintendent, who is herself a thoroughly qualified nurse, visits the patients with the probationers and gives them practical lessons at the bedside. Experience is also gained in a free dispensary with which the home has been connected for the last seven years. Courses of lectures too are given to the nurses by many of the physicians who employ their services. The period of probation is two years, after which time a diploma is granted. The rate of remuneration received by these nurses depends entirely upon the amount of charity support accorded the mission from year to year, the work itself being the first consideration. In the report for 1900 it was stated:

* Read at the Congress in Buffalo, September, 1901.

“Gratuities to nurses (eight in number), four hundred and twenty-one dollars and twenty-five cents. In addition to the home being rent free, there is a city grant of two hundred and fifty dollars, but the remainder of the support is from voluntary subscriptions, no charges being made to the patients.”

Two sets of deaconesses, the Anglican and the Methodist, do district nursing also in the city of Toronto. Some of these women are admitted to Grace Hospital and Western Hospital for three-months' training, and afterwards, in connection with their course in church and Bible history, they go out in district nursing work during the remainder of their two years.

In Montreal district nursing started in connection with a diet dispensary which was established in 1879, but it was not until six years later that the necessity for a visiting nurse became apparent to the managers of the institution. The success of this nurse's work was so marked that very soon an assistant was appointed. Neither of these women was trained, but the pioneer in the work served for thirteen years before her retirement.

Early in the year 1897, the year of the celebration of our late beloved Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the women of Western or Newer Canada recommended that an organization be formed as a Jubilee offering to her Majesty which would provide nursing service in the more remote districts of the dominion. The Countess of Aberdeen, wife of the then Governor-General of Canada, responded in a most enthusiastic manner to this proposal. But to carry such a scheme to a successful issue in so varied and extensive a country as Canada proved to be a difficult task. When the project known as the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada was finally launched, owing to the false rumors as to the aims of the order, it met with little or no favorable response from either doctors or nurses. Dr. Alfred Worcester, of Waltham, Mass., who was invited by the Countess of Aberdeen for this purpose, aided very materially in overcoming the prejudices of many by giving addresses in some of the larger cities on district nursing, and by showing how the Victorian Order might be managed on more economical lines than were at first thought possible. Finally a fund was started and organization began. The constitution, by-laws, and regulations were drawn up and a royal charter procured. The royal charter authorized the formation of a Board of Governors which should have the management and control of the order and of its affairs, and it also appointed his Excellency the Governor-General of Canada as patron.

Five members of the Board of Governors are selected by the patron, and the others by the Canadian Medical Association, by each Provincial

Medical Association, and by each local association according to the amount of its yearly income. There is an Executive Council, made up from the members of the board, whose numbers and powers are defined by the governors.

The chief lady superintendent is appointed by the Board of Governors, and the most prominent among her duties are the organizing of new branches, recommending suitable district lady superintendents and nurses, overseeing their work, and reporting on the same. The order undertakes to teach district nursing.

Only nurses holding diplomas from some recognized hospital training-school and who come highly recommended are considered eligible for the course of training in district nursing. A period of four-months' probation is given at the Training-Home either at Montreal or Toronto to test the adaptability, tact, and previous training of these nurses. During that time they are provided with board, lodging, laundry, and an allowance of twenty dollars a month. At the expiration of this course the nurse, if she is desirous and has proved herself acceptable, is recommended to the Board of Governors as a candidate for the order. She is then presented with her diploma and badge, either by her Excellency, the wife of the Governor-General, or by one of the governors, who admits her to the order in the following words:

"By the authority of the Board of Governors, I have the honor of admitting you formally into the ranks of the Victorian Order of Nurses. You have been recommended to the Board of Governors by the chief lady superintendent as a nurse possessing the qualifications and training which our order requires, and have proved through your training in district nursing your efficiency in all your nursing work and your willingness to observe all the regulations of the order. We therefore welcome you very heartily to the order, and we enlist you for active service for two years. May you be enabled to carry into action the true spirit of the order, and may God's best blessing rest upon you."

The nurse thus admitted and pledged for two-years' service in the order must be prepared to go anywhere in the dominion, either for district nursing or to serve in one of the cottage hospitals. She is provided with her outfit (uniform and nursing bag) and receives a salary of not less than three hundred dollars a year, with maintenance and laundry. She is also entitled to one-month's holiday each year. Should she remain in the order for three or more years, she will have a miniature badge presented to her like the one worn by her during her term of service, with the dates of entrance and retirement engraved on it, as a souvenir of her work.

The trustees of the Waltham Training-School for Nurses at the

inception of the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada sent over their superintendent for three months, and afterwards released her from her duties at Waltham that she might accept permanently the position of chief lady superintendent of the order. She, with five nurses who had graduated at Waltham, began work early in February of 1898. During the three months branches were established in four of the larger cities and four nurses were equipped and sent with the militia to the Yukon, where they performed most heroic services.

The work of the order has slowly but steadily progressed, and has been extended from coast to coast. Out of the twenty-six branches which have been established in a little over three years, twenty-four are carrying on the work successfully. In all there are fifty nurses engaged in the work.

This year a greater effort than ever is being made to provide suitable buildings for cottage hospitals. Her Excellency the Countess of Minto is doing much to create a special fund for this purpose. It will be known as the "Lady Minto Fund for erecting Queen Victoria Cottage Hospitals" in memory of our late beloved sovereign. Model plans have already been drawn for cottage hospitals to accommodate either six or ten patients, two nurses, and a maid. Since the inauguration of the order seven cottage hospitals have been established, and, although several of these buildings may be regarded as mere apologies for hospitals, most excellent work has been done within their walls. As an illustration of the assistance afforded by the order in establishing cottage hospitals, which, after all, are really district nursing stations, the following account is given:

In a small town in the Northwest Territories the women who are members of the National Council had put by a small sum of money towards a building fund for a hospital; but as they met with no encouragement from the men of the town, they felt their project must be postponed indefinitely. Just then the Victorian Order came to their assistance and advised them to rent a cottage and make it habitable for patients. A nurse from the order was sent to take charge. Within a few months a request was made by the local committee for a second nurse. In the following year patients were refused admittance, owing to the overcrowded condition of the building. Enteric fever, maternity, surgical, and chronic cases have all been cared for there, and several major operations have been performed in the small room which the nurses occupy as their dining- and sitting-room. Great inconveniences have been overcome by these devoted nurses in their desire to serve these patients, who otherwise in many cases would have been left to take shelter in a third-rate boarding-house with only such care as the slat-

ternly servants might give them. However, the nurses have now been rewarded, having just moved into a fine brick building erected for this purpose. As the expense of keeping a staff of four Victorian Order nurses in this little hospital would be too great, a training-school consisting of four probationers under a highly qualified superintendent is now in progress. There are only twenty beds, but as the cases are varied, and a thoroughly well planned curriculum enforced during a term of three years, including three months of district nursing, there is no apprehension of their not being well fitted for district or cottage hospital nursing in the West.

These Victorian Cottage Hospitals will be open to give a training in nursing to the Doukebour, or educated Indian girl, that she may be of special service to her own people.

Innumerable instances might be related of the blessing the Victorian Order nurse has been in the cottage hospital to the homeless sufferer, in the humble room of the crowded tenement-house during her daily visits in the city districts, or in the rural districts, where she may have to drive ten or fifteen miles and even canoe up a river in order to reach her patient. In the latter case the nurse may have to remain a few days if her services are not required in the village and the patient requires special care.

One of the chief difficulties has been an inadequate supply of good nurses. This is pioneer work, and it does not appeal to those who like a city life with its brightness and comfort, though it should be said that even in remote districts the Victorian Order nurse is not by any means forgotten or neglected. No nurse practising her calling, even in most luxurious homes, can receive such honor and hearty gratitude as is accorded to our nurses amid their rude surroundings. In one of the most outlying districts, where every effort to procure suitable board and lodging for the nurse had failed, her committee had a small shack built and furnished for her use.

The Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada needs women in it for country as well as for city districts,—women who are capable of performing the highest duty on earth, namely, in helping their fellow-beings back to health, also helping them to lead noble, clean, and wholesome lives, inwardly as well as outwardly.

The Victorian Order, in common with the whole empire, mourns deeply the loss of her after whom it was named; but the Queen's nurses will undoubtedly respond more quickly than ever to the inspiration of her life—as noble Woman and as noble Queen.